

## of baseball bats and psychic powers by emmaofmisthaven

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** F/M

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Eleven (Stranger Things), Kali Prasad, Steve Harrington, The Stranger Things Kids

**Relationships:** Eleven & Kali Prasad, Kali Prasad/Steve Harrington

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2017-11-12

**Updated:** 2017-11-26

**Packaged:** 2022-04-03 05:01:34

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 4

**Words:** 7,543

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

She doesn't seem too impressed, and Steve suddenly wonders if that's what being in one of the dipshits' shoes feels like. He doesn't particularly enjoy it. Still, she does move closer to his now lit Zippo, cigarette in her mouth, and maybe he stares a little at the way the flame turns her brown eyes into molten gold.

(One thought: the fuck?)

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

you: Steve x Billy  
me, an intellectual: Steve x Kali

ㄟ(ツ)ㄟ

Steve can't exactly point out which events led him to where he is today – out of his cadet uniform after a long day of work, sitting on the hood of his car in front of the arcade – but if he had to make an educated guess, he would say it all started with a can of red spray paint and a pitiful fight in a back alley. Not that he particularly regrets anything that led him to this moment but. Well, he would like it better if the little dipshits could actually leave the arcade on time. But that's asking too much of them.

The bitter part of him hopes one of them – his money is on Red, for obvious reasons – will get their driving license soon so he's no longer the designated chauffeur. But let's be real, he kinda like it. It's a nice break from Hopper breathing down his neck all day long, and the kids are actually fun to be around most of the time. They make him laugh. He likes them, even if he'll never say it out loud.

Even if they always push their luck with timing. Six o'clock is six o'clock, Jesus fucking Christ. He's about to stand up and go and grab them by the collars of their nerdy shirts to shove them out of the arcade and inside the car, when a minivan parks next to him. The engine is loud enough to startle him, his heart beating fast – add that to the long list of shit that never goes away. He gives the vehicle a quick glance before he focuses back on the Zippo in his hand, flicking it open and close out of habit. He can't even remember the last time he had a smoke. Hopper made the station a cigarette-free zone ever since El forced him to stop.

“Hey. Give me a spark.”

Steve doesn't quite jump out of his skin this time, but his eyes are still a little wild when he turns to the person who appeared next to

him. And then a lot wild. What she lacks in height – almost a full head shorter than he is – she sure as hell makes up in charisma. And fashion. Her brown skin looks so smooth and soft it clashes with the heavy eyeliner around her eyes and the buzz cut on the side of her skull and the leather she's wearing from head to toes. Steve has never seen punks before, not outside of like, magazines and MTV, and. Wow. Just wow.

It takes him a few more seconds to remember she asked something. "Oh, yeah, sure. Yeah. Come closer."

She doesn't seem too impressed, and Steve suddenly wonders if that's what being in one of the dipshits' shoes feels like. He doesn't particularly enjoy it. Still, she does move closer to his now lit Zippo, cigarette in her mouth, and maybe he stares a little at the way the flame turns her brown eye into molten gold.

(One thought: the fuck?)

Her cigarette doesn't exactly smell of tobacco, but he's too confused for a second to remember he's the damn police. Also he's out of uniform. Also, he has a feeling she would just laugh in his face if he told her anything about it. So, really, it has nothing to do with her eyes when he decides to drop it. Nothing at all.

Thankfully for him and his mental wellbeing, it is the moment the dipshits finally choose to get out of the arcade in all their loud, rowdy glory. Dustin spots him first, as he always does, grinning and waving at him. Will is next to him, Lucas and Red behind, Mike and El coming last with holding hands and heads tilt toward each other in secret whispers. How two kids can have a better relationship than adults twice their age, Steve will never understand. He does admire and envy it, though, just a little.

"Never learnt to read time?" he calls after all of them with an exasperate sigh.

Red replies with a middle finger while the boys start complaining back at him. Fucking typical. He's about to say something about how their parents are after his ass if they're late for dinner, when punk hottie next to him shifts a little on the spot. And then El raises her

head, and stops in her tracks, and goes so pale Steve actually forgets anything he was about to say. He frowns, ready for – whatever. He's just ready.

"Kali?" the girl asks, so soft he barely hears it over the boys' chitchatting.

He looks to the punkette. Her mouth isn't exactly into a smile, but the corners are twitching slightly when she says, "Hey, Jane."

It takes Steve a second to realise she's referring to El. Nobody calls her Jane, ever. Not even the teachers, who have taken to her nickname too, so it's easy to forget she's technically, officially Jane Hopper. She's just El, for everyone, and nobody questions it.

Except pretty punk here, apparently.

By now, even Dustin has shut up, and they all look between the two girls in a mix of curiosity and confusion. There are several beats of a silence so tense you could cut it with a knife, before El lets go of Mike's hand and runs toward the other girl. Punkette's arms are already open, welcoming El into a thigh hug that leaves everyone else all the more confused. Red whispers something to Lucas, who shrugs. Will elbows Dustin, who elbows him back. Mike, poor kid, just frowns.

They stay in each other's arm a little while longer before letting go, punkette's hands cupping El's face instead. Tears are rolling down El's pink cheeks, and she sniffs a little.

"He's dead," the older girl tells her. "It's over. He's dead."

El raises her eyebrows, incredulous, her lips wobbling. "For real?"

"Yeah. We're free."

There is more hugging involved – geez, isn't Steve glad El and Red are not that touchy feely, this is unnerving. That is until Dustin, bless him, decides he's had enough. "Excuse me. Who the fuck are you?"

Punkette sends him a glare above El's shoulder, and Dustin takes a step back. Which. Okay, Steve would have too, to be honest. It's quite

an effective death glare. El looks back at her friends even if her hand is now holding the other girl's, unwilling to let go.

Whatever she is about to say, whichever new bomb she's about to drop on them, Steve has an inkling she'd rather not do it right there, in the middle of the street for everyone to see. They already have a bit (lot) of a reputation as it is, what with Will's case and how El appeared from nowhere as the Chief's daughter and whatnot. Let's just not aggravate everything, okay.

"Let's go to the cabin first," he tells her. And then, when nobody moves, "Car! Now!"

Thankfully for him, The Voice has an effect on most of the dipshits and they all go running, Will sitting on the front seat while the others pile up in the back. Not so thankfully, El remains just where she is, and her brand new friend puts up a fight.

"Jane can drive with me."

A small laugh escapes him because, "Nope. Nu-uh. No way."

She comes head to... well, head to collarbone really, with him, managing to both look up at him and look down on him at the same time. Which. Impressive. He's about to keep going, because there is no way some punk stranger is kidnapping his psychic child in front of him, thank you very much, when...

When everything goes dark. He blinks around the darkness, frowns in confusing when the only thing he can see is her in front of him despite the lack of light. Everything is oppressive, suffocating, but. He's Steve fucking Harrington. He swung a bat at a monster, lit a bunch of Demodogs on fire, and lived to tell the tale. He won't be terrified by a girl with psychic abilities and too much eyeliner.

"Get out of my head!" he snaps at her. "El is coming with me."

It's like she switched the lights on again, arcade to his left, kids staring at him to his right, El and her psycho friend in front of him. She tilts her head to the side, long purple hair falling in front of his face, and Steve very much feels like he's being judged right now.

“Fine,” she says finally. “I’ll be close behind.”

“Yeah, you do that.” He looks at El then, all the fight out of him, “In the car, kiddo.”

She doesn’t complain once. Bless her.

They make it to the end of the road before all the kids explode with questions, speaking over each other until it’s just a mess of sounds and yells and ridiculousness. Steve is so, so tired already.

“Okay, enough. HEY! ENOUGH!” They all comply, sitting back in their seats. Steve look at El in the rearview mirror. She’s sitting on Mike’s lap and looking back at him, nothing in her eyes to give away a clue of what the fuck is going on. Go figure. “Who’s she and how dangerous is she?”

El hesitates, just for a second. Steve makes a left, and watches the bloody minivan following him close. Geez, she wasn’t kidding.

“Her name’s Kali. She’s my sister.”

New explosion of noises. Yeah, Steve didn’t exactly expect that either. It gets so loud so quickly that El doesn’t reply anything at all, which, fair enough he guesses. He glances at her in the mirror once more, watches her let Mike take her into his arms as if to protect her from the world around her. He’s been awfully silent, which isn’t that big of a surprise. If anyone knows about what happened, it’s Mike. It’s always been Mike.

They all stumble out of the car when he parks as close to the cabin as possible. The minivan stops so close to his rear end he thinks the crazy punkette will bump into him at first. But she doesn’t, instead turning off the ignition and slamming the door close. She’s into El’s space in a matter of seconds, as if she needs to be close to her, and it sends all of Steve’s alarm bells ringing. He grabs the radio and switches it to the station’s frequency, asks Flo to get Hopper to talk to him.

“Better be good, Harrington,” comes the gruff voice a few seconds later.

Steve folds his arms on the wheel, and lets out a chuckle. "Oh believe me, it is." He licks his lips, looks for the right words. "Know how El never told us what happened in Chicago?" he asks.

Hopper is silent for a moment too long, before he answers with a, "Yeah?"

"Well, now we know. And you're not gonna like it."

"Fucking hell."

## 2. Chapter 2

### Notes for the Chapter:

I'm seriously blown away by the feedback on this fic! I didn't expect so many people to give some love to this crackship, and yet here we are!

I'm so very terrible at replying to review, but believe me when I say that each and every one of them is cherished and keeps me going.

Kali doesn't exactly know what to expect when she enters the cabin. It looks old and musty from the outside, not unlike the empty warehouse she's been squatting since she was fourteen. One gets used to never truly be warm again after a while, that shiver down your spine, nose ice cold in the middle of the night. But whatever she expected when she entered the cabin, arm clasped in Jane's, it isn't this.

Everything is warm and welcoming, in a rustic kind of way. There are pillows on the couch and books everywhere, a few pictures above the fireplace. She even spots a bunch of drawings on the fridge across the room, even if her eyes are more interested in the pictures.

Home for Kali is a long lost concept. Flashes of a life that used to be hers behind her eyelids – London in the summer, all the lights during Diwali, the henna on her hands and in Mamma's hair. Home for Jane is a gruffly man and a ragtag bunch of skinny kids, the smell of burning logs and ancient dust.

It leaves Kali... nostalgic for a past she never got to live. For a life ripped from her clenching hands.

"Do you want something to drink?" Jane is at her side, a glass of water in her hand. She's taller now, her hair longer. So far from the small toddler who'd draw until there were smudges of crayon all over the paper.

"Nothing stronger?" she asks, her fingers in desperate need of a



cigarette to hold.

One of the boys, the one with the curly hair and colourful vocabulary, snorts a laugh. "Hopper locked the wine cellar. Says he doesn't trust us."

"As should he," says goody-two-shoes from where he leans against a wall, arms folded in his chest. Kali glares at him, but he doesn't react. It unnerves her.

She downs her glass of water. Too bad her powers never worked on her own mind, otherwise she would have tricked herself into believing it was vodka. She winces, before she hands the glass back to her sister. Her sister, god. Kali never was a very sentimental person, but she has to admit she missed Jane. They were only together for a few days, and there are many a great things she regrets doing in such a small amount of time, but. At the end of the day, Jane is still her sister and Kali was not lying when she said she felt whole again by her side.

Like she can breathe easily again for the first time in ages.

"How you doing?" she asks softly.

Kali doesn't do sentimental, or anything of the like, but still she raises a hand to brush her fingers against Jane's cheek. Her hair is so much longer now, falling in pretty curls on her shoulders. She doesn't dress like a farm girl anymore, but there is still something suburban about her, like she can't shake it off. The way Kali can't shake off the look that comes from a decade living in the streets of Chicago. The dirt under her nails was never meant to go away.

"Good," she replies, soft. The fire still burns in her eyes, but it has been tamed by peace and quiet. Kali envies her that. "We haven't had any problems since... last time. I'm going to school now."

No monsters, no evil government, just the jolly old life of a teenage girl. Kali definitely envies her that, in a weird way. Normal has never been in the cards for her, and she's done a good job of acting like it's fine. No use letting your mind wander on things you'll never get, after all. It hurts, and Kali stopped hurting when she was ten.

Still, she is happy for Jane, because Jane is happy. This kind of selflessness is new, but welcomed. It makes for a nice change. "I'm glad to hear it."

Jane is about to add something when the front door opens with a loud bang, and Kali reacts before she even thinks. One hand grabs Jane to pull her behind her, a blade switching open in her other hand as she faces the newcomer. She vaguely hears the teenagers gasp and whistle in response, all her senses focused on the man at the door. The beige uniform and the badge on his hip only make her tighten her hold on the knife, until she remembers what Jane told her. Doesn't mean she move, though.

"What the hell?" comes the loud, bear-like voice. The man glares at her, and Kali glares back. "Kid, let go of the knife."

Behind her, Jane grabs her arm with both her hands, squeezing until it pinches. "It's fine. It's Hopper, he's not a bad man."

"I sure as hell am not," the guy echoes.

Which, not helping. But Kali will believe Jane's opinion above all else, at this point, so she stands straighter after another beat, folding the knife before she slides it back into the pocket of her jeans. The kids are staring at her, and so is goody-two-shoes. His eyebrows disappear beneath his stupid fringe, a familiar look in his eyes – confused lust, yep, she's used to those.

"Sorry," she tells the policeman. She's anything but.

His eyes travel up and down her body, frowning, before he sighs loudly. He doesn't say anything as he moves toward the kitchen, opens the fridge and cracks open a beer. So much for not having alcohol, but Kali knows better than to ask for a bottle. Instead, she waits for him to sit down in the only armchair, and to point at the couch with his beer.

"Sit. Talk."

And so she does.

The words come difficulty to her at first, as she talks about her

childhood in London, discovering her powers, being kidnapped and shipped of to another country. Cold and caged and lonely, terrified. It somewhat gets easier as she goes on, talks of the rainbow room and Jane as a toddler, the tests and experiments, being probed and pushed until her nose bled and she passed out from exhaustion. Jane being taken to another room. Deciding to escape. Not being able to free Jane and having to leave her behind. Finding her way to Chicago. The life she made for herself here.

She leaves out the details of life as a runaway brown girl. They want the truth but they don't need the trauma, the nightmares and memories she swallowed down to make herself stronger. They don't deserve her secrets.

When she finishes with an explanation about how she found and killed Brenner, Kali is so exhausted she rubs her hand under her nose.

It comes out clean.

...

She leans against the wall, staring at the forest without seeing it. It is quick but for the quiet hoots of an owl and the sound of cooking and table dressing inside. The night wind is cold against her cheeks, a sharp contrast with the warmth of the cabin and in her blood.

Kali hates that she feels like that, so at odds with the world. After her tale, Jane had shown her her bedroom, with the teddy bear on the bed and the books on the desk and the pictures pinned to the walls. This outrageous display of normalcy doesn't sit well on Kali's stomach. Jealousy isn't an emotion she is particularly fond of but, seeing Jane so at peace in this little world of hers, so loved and cared for, it stirs something within Kali, something that had been dormant for too long. It is why she came her, she knows, but having her nose pushed into it on the first evening is a little too painful for her own good.

Hence, taking a time out, away from this life she never wanted for herself but can't help but envy.

She's grabbing a cigarette, pack in one hand while the other pats her pockets for a lighter, when the front door opens to her left. She's about to tell Jane to go back inside, it's cold and she will get sick, but it is not Jane opening the door. Instead, Kali finds herself frowning at goody-two-shoes when he offers her a tentative smile. Yeah, she isn't smiling back.

"Fire?" he asks her, taking the same Zippo as before out of his his pocket.

She snaps it from him, lights up her cigarette in a second, before pocketing the lighter. He looks affronted, but doesn't call her out. Instead, he rolls his eyes and leans next to her on the wall.

"At least it's tobacco this time," he comments, nodding to the pack of Marlboro still in her hand.

Kali's glare hardens. "And you are?"

"The babysitter," he replies without missing a beat. There is a smile at the corners of his mouth, but she'll be damned before she asks him what the private joke is. She very much doesn't give a fuck. "Name's Steve."

"Cool."

She's not looking at him anymore, gazing back at the forest in front of her, but his stare is drilling holes into the side of her head. She wonders how he would react, if she snapped at him. If he would react at all, the creep. He wasn't in any of Jane's stories about what happened after she escaped the lab, and Kali wonders where he fits in all of this. What happened for him not to be scared of her powers and her invading his mind.

"I have a perfectly comfortable couch if you want," he goes on.

She does stare at him this time. How could she not? "What?"

His ears and cheeks turn red, but he doesn't look away from her. It

takes balls. “Don’t tell me you wanna stay with Hopper. Nobody ever do, and you just admitted that you’re a murderer so...” He shrugs, like this is a perfectly normal conversation to have with the estranged sister who dropped out of nowhere. “And I have a couch, cold beers, and I can look the other way when you’re smoking pot.”

She squints at him. “You’re a cop too.” Less of a question, more of a fact.

He shrugs again. “In training. But, like, it’s Hawkins. We’re used to looking the other way.”

Kali hesitates. She doesn’t want to stay away from Jane now that they are reunited, but goody-two-shoes has a point. Kali doesn’t feel entirely comfortable under the policeman’s knowing gaze, not after confessing to several murders under the guise of vengeance. He seems nice and all, especially since he’s letting Jane use her powers now, but. Still. Once a cop, always a cop.

She looks him up and down, smirks a little at the way he fidgets under her gaze. What’s the worse that could happen, anyway? Jane will be, like, fifteen minutes away at best. She can mentally reach out to Kali if she wants to speak. And they’ll see each other tomorrow, and the day after. And he’s right. Kali’d rather be with someone her age, just for a little while. She does miss Mick with a passion.

“What’s your name again?”

He grins.

### 3. Chapter 3

#### Notes for the Chapter:

If you're looking for a plot... well, so am I.

Steve rents a little flat above the electronics shop, despite his parents' protests. His mother had wanted him to stay at home for a little while longer and then his father had offered to help with the deposit on a house, which was so fucking ridiculous Steve refused immediately. He likes his bachelor pad, like Nancy calls it, and the fact that he can spend his days off in nothing but his boxers without anybody to see or judge. It's just enough independence for him who still doesn't entirely have his shit together.

Kali follows him inside, failing to look bored as her eyes roam every inch of the main room. His cereal bowl is still on the coffee table and he can't remember the last time he did the dishes, which wasn't a problem before a hot, deadly girl showed up. Playing host isn't that good an idea, all of a sudden.

"Pizza okay with you?" He makes his way to the fridge, grabs two cold beers and offers one to her.

She opens it and takes a long gulp, a sigh escaping her mouth when she licks the beer off her upper lip. Steve does a pitiful job of not staring.

"Vegetarian for me," she answer. Then, when she notices his raised eyebrows, she points to herself. "Hindu."

Steve stares at her, perplexed. "Isn't alcohol forbidden?"

Her eye roll is so impressive he's afraid her eyes will be stuck at the back of her head for a moment, but then she's back to glaring at him. "That's Islam, you idiot."

"Fine, fine." Can't really blame him for not knowing those things. Hawkins is mostly white with, like, two black families and a Jewish one. That's about it.

She's still glaring by the time he reaches the phone and punches in the pizza parlour's number. Better not linger on why he knows the number by heart, or how he doesn't have to give his address. He just asks for two pizzas, one pepperoni, one cheese, and leaves it at that. The phone rings again the moment he hangs up, and he blinks at it before picking it again.

"Hullo?"

"Hey, Steve." Sometimes, he wonders if his heart will stop doing that weird flip-flop thing every time he hears Nancy's voice. He's pretty sure some small part of him will always be in love with her, even if he's over her now, moved on and everything. It's kinda hard, completely forgetting your first love. He's been doing an okay job, but some feelings linger.

"Hey, Nance." He spares a glance for Kali, who's now looking at the pictures of the dipshits and him stuck to his fridge, before he takes the phone off its hook on the wall and moves to his bedroom, closing the door behind him. "What's up?"

"I wanted to check in. Mom says she hasn't seen Mike today and nobody's answer at Joyce's so..." So I'm wondering if the end of the world is near. Steve knows the feeling.

"He's fine. We're fine. Everybody gathered at Hopper's and..." He sighs, loud, as he sits down on his bed, one hand in his hair. "Turns out Dustin and I are the only sibling-less in the gang."

Only silence answers for a few seconds, before, "What do you mean -- is Joyce -- wait. What?"

Steve lets out a low chuckle, before he fills Nancy in. She's back on the West Coast with Jonathan, settling in San Francisco a couple of weeks before uni starts again. Steve tries not to feel too jealous of them, because he loves his life and everything, but. Sometimes, he wishes he'd gotten out of Hawkins, too.

Nancy, bless her heart, gasps at all the right places, never interrupting him until he's done with his tale. Even when he's done, she stays silent for a little while longer, and he pictures her nibbling

on her bottom lip or playing with her hair or something very Nancy-like to do.

When she speaks again, it's with the kind of mirth in her voice that has Steve wish she didn't speak at all. "So, she's hot right?"

He lets himself fall backward in bed, one arm above his eyes, with a loud groan. "Is that all you're focusing on?"

She laughs. "You're telling me King Steve would let a girl come to his bachelor pad if he didn't have the hots for her?"

"Hey! Be nice! I let you come to my place, and El, and Red and..."

"Joyce?" He hears the smirk in her voice, and he hates her for it. Just a little. "I mean, girls you're actually planning to sleep with, not your almost-sisters and everyone's mom."

"And you."

"And me."

Steve is the one to let the silence linger this time. He's so very glad he managed to stay friends with Nancy, after everything. Their friendship was rocky at best, at first, when she told him what happened with Jonathan and he nursed his broken heart but. He has no idea what he would do without her as his best friend, even now that she lives so far away. She understands him in a way nobody else ever did.

"Yeah, she's pretty."

"Pretty?" she asks with a laugh. "Wow, even worse than I thought."

"Okay I'm going to hang up on you now."

She laughs again. "Come on, Steve!"

"Bye, Nancy!"

She's still talking to him and laughing when he actually hangs up the phone, a smile on his lips. He needed that, someone who doesn't



hero-worship him like the kids do, or glare at him like Hopper, and now Kali, do, or anything. Nancy doesn't believe his bullshit, and forces him to face the truth. Not that he was particularly denying having the hots for Kali. He has eyes, after all.

When he goes back to the living room and puts the phone where it belongs, it's to find Kali lounging in his couch. She's stripped off a few layers of clothes and is now down to a simple black tank top and her jeans, boots and jackets on the floor. There's a hole in one sock and another one on her knee, and she's showing way more skin than Steve was ready for. Also, she has her nose in a book, and doesn't look up even when she says, "Girlfriend?"

"Ex, actually. Now best friend."

She raises an eyebrow but still won't look at him, and Steve wonders when exactly he lost his charms with women. If he ever had them in the first place. Or if Kali is a special case, in more than one way.

He's stopped in his musings, and in Nancy's words coming back to haunt him, by a knock on the door. It's his usual delivery guy, some boy he vaguely remembers from high school, and Steve tips him as he grabs both pizza boxes then slams the door shut with his foot. Kali is still reading when he puts the pizzas on the coffee table and sits in the armchair, but she perks up a little at the greasy smell.

"What are you reading?" he asks, because maybe awkward conversation is better than awkward silence.

She doesn't look up, and deadpans, "Pride and Prejudice," even if he can clearly see she's holding a Margaret Atwood book. It's going to be a long night.

"What's this about?"

She sighs, and for a moment he believes she's not going to answer. But then, "It's a dystopia where fertile women are the slaves of rich families who want children."

That's. Okay. Wow. "I too read to escape the shitty world we live in," he finds himself replying, like a moron.

She snorts a laugh, looking up at him above the top of her book, before she closes it and puts it aside. She grabs a slice of pizza next, smirking at him with her mouth full of food, head tilt to the side. Steve wonders what she sees, what she's looking for. He's but a suburban kid with bad jokes and a history of getting himself into trouble and she -- is so much more than that. Much more trouble, too.

"Where do you fit in all of this?" she asks after a while, around another mouthful of pizza. "Jane never mentioned you."

"Probably because we only met after she came back from her little Chicago adventure," he replies. Only in passing, and then he'd been at the hospital for two days because of the concussion Billy gave him, and El had been passed out for a full week, and it was another week before they were formally introduced by Dustin. He still remembers the bags under her too big eyes and the smile at the mention of him saving all of their annoying asses in the tunnels. "Told you, I was the babysitter."

Kali purses her lips, before she points to the corner of the room. "That to play with the kids?"

He doesn't have to look to know she noticed the baseball bat in the corner. He used to keep it in the trunk of his car, until Hopper saw it and lectured him about safety issues. Now it stays here, ready to be grabbed if something happens. It hasn't moved in months, thank god. "Yeah, Mike's into baseball," he replies, with a smirk of his own.

"You're weird."

In her mouth, it sounds like a compliment.

...

He has to fight her over offering his bed to her, because he's too chivalrous for his own good and she's too stubborn and this entire scenario is too fucking stupid. Yeah, his couch is not the least

comfortable and she's small enough that she would fit nicely, but. His mother raised him better, okay? When you have a guest over, the guest gets the bed. That's, like, the most basic rule of all.

Kali rolls her eyes, but she gives up at some point, and throws one pillow at his face before he grabs a spare blanket. She locks herself in the bathroom too, while she's at it, and Steve fails not to stare when she comes out with a clean face. It makes her look -- soft. Small. Almost vulnerable. She still has the tattoos, and the crazy hair, but now she doesn't look so tough anymore.

Looks can be deceiving.

"Good night, then." She's standing in the doorframe, one foot on top of the other, like she doesn't know what to do with her body. Her arms swing a little by her sides, and an awkward smile curls up her lips. Like she doesn't quite know how to deal with kindness and hospitality, which reminds Steve of Hopper's stories about Eleven. Makes sense.

Steve decides to put her out of her misery with a smile of his own. "Yeah. 'Night."

She lingers for a second longer, before she nods to herself and turns around. The door closes, and then silence settles in. Steve sighs, and rubs his face, before he lies on the couch. It's too small of him, and he struggles to find a comfortable position for long minutes, tossing and turning until he manages to have all his limbs under the blanket and his back not screaming in agony too much.

It's going to be a long night. Especially since he pictures her every time he closes his eyes, all soft skin and long hair and mysterious eyes, and he hates himself for how predictable he is. Throw a new girl his way, not some Hawkins chick he's known his whole life, and he's a pathetic fool. In his mind, Nancy is laughing loudly and Jonathan is shaking his head. They both have a point.

## 4. Chapter 4

The sheets on his bed are too clean, the mattress too soft, everything too quiet. Kali can't remember the last time she slept in a proper bed, in a proper bedroom, not some old and broken mattress thrown on the floor and only a small blanket as cover, shivering all through the night and holding her jacket close to her nose. She turns and turns in bed, unable to fall asleep when everything is too comfortable to her liking. She knows not to get used to such luxury, knows that it will be taken away from her in the morning. No way goodie-two-shoes will agree to let her crash in his bed for more than one night, and no way she is begging the policeman for shelter. Back to the van it will be, then. As always.

She grabs the Zippo on the bedside table, switches it on. It casts golden shadows on the room, stretching across the floor and on the walls. She only stares at the flame, until her eyes go blurry and her mind empty. That's when she notices she's not alone, not anymore. A smile stretches her lips when Jane sits next to her on the bed, her legs tucked under her. Her hair falls in wild curls around her face, her grown body dwarfed by the oversized Star Wars t-shirt she wears to sleep. She looks nothing like the girl who found Kali in a deserted warehouse, and Kali longs for the little farm girl who tilted her world upside down.

"Evening," she says, sitting up. She snatches the Zippo close, but keeps it in her hand.

Jane smiles, that beautiful smile of hers that goes all the way up to her eyes. "Evening, sister," she whispers. "Max is staying for the night, so I can't be loud."

Kali wonders who Max is. She can't remember if Max was part of the stories Jane told her, or even if Max is a boy or a girl. Jesus, Kali hopes it's the little redhead girl, and not one of the boys. "Sure, don't worry," is all she replies instead, because she has no right playing the overprotective older sister now.

Jane remains silence for long minutes after that, lost in her own thoughts. It reminds Kali of that one night they spent together in the

warehouse, how small and lost she was, how silent. Just like she was silent in the laboratory, barely able to say more than two words despite Kali's best attempts at teaching her to talk properly.

"He's really dead?" is what she settles on after a while.

Not that it surprises Kali in the least. It is, after all, the reason why she came to Hawkins in the first place -- to let Jane know they are freed from him at last, that they will never have to look above their shoulder in dread, that he's but a nightmare from the past. Brenner is dead, and so is Kali's thirst for revenge and blood. "He is. I killed him myself."

Jane licks her lips. And then, "Show me."

No surprise there either, but Kali hesitates. Jane has seen the ugliest part of her, but still. Kali doesn't want her sister to see her with blood on her hands, no matter how satisfying it was. She doesn't want Jane's opinion of her to change, or for her to look at her a different way. Still, Jane needs proof. And proof she will get.

Kali closes her eyes, focuses on the memory of that day, three weeks ago. She paints the picture as vividly as possible. A badly lit office in an old building, neon lights flickering. The sun setting on a nameless city outside the window. The cup of cold coffee on top of a stack of papers, a folder opened on a desk. The old couch in a corner, the shelves full with books on the walls. And him, behind the desk. Barely surprised to see her. Not even afraid. Just his damn fucking smirk, like she was a prey and he's finally caught her in his trap. How wrong he had been. How stupid too, to underestimate her.

She had grabbed the cup of coffee, smashed it against the side of his head before he could even offer her a snarky greeting. Cold drops splashing her face, pieces of porcelain dropping on the floor. Him, falling out of his chair under the strength of her attack.

Her, standing over him, one foot on his chest.

"Fancy meeting you here, asshole," she'd snarled.

"You don't want to do this," he'd replied.

Like he knew her better than herself. There was a time when he'd been right, when he'd almost brainwashed her into forgetting her family -- the real one, the one waiting for her in London -- and had her believe she was insane. A time when he wanted her to believe she was a bad influence on 011, and that was why they were keeping them separated now. A time when he had tracked her down the country like an animal, after weeks of planning how to escape this dreadful place.

But not anymore. "You don't know shit about what I want," she'd replied, her heel against his breastbone until the air escaped him in a small whimper. A sound so satisfying it'd made her smile.

"How does it feel, Brenner? To know you've lost. To know Jane and I will never help you with your bullshit? That we're free to live our life, instead of being your lab rats?" He'd made for an answer, but she had just added more pressure with her heel, and grinned. "Fuck you. Fuck everything you stand for. You made our lives a living hell, but it's over now. You're over."

His death had been a long, painful one. But Jane doesn't need to see that. Instead, Kali jumps forward in time, to the moment he exhaled his last breath. She can hear Jane gasp by her side, and that is when Kali decides to stop it here, to erase everything around them until only remains the off-white walls of goodie-two-shoes' bedroom.

"He's dead," Jane says.

"He's dead," Kali echoes. "He can't hurt us anymore."

Jane is shivering, her skinny arms wrapped around her waist, so Kali shifts on the bed. At first she doesn't know if the mental connection will allow for physical contact, but Jane's shoulder is solid against her fingers, and soon she wraps her sister in a tight hug, holds her as Jane's tears damp her neck. Happiness and relief and sadness all at once, as her little sister crumbles in her arms. Kali pets her hair, caresses her back, whispers words of comfort. Her body is stiff against Jane's, not used to intimacy, but she knows better than to complain. Especially when her sister needs her.

It is a long while before Jane's frail body no longer shakes with sobs,

before she sits up and rubs her eyes with the back of her hand. Her eyes are red, her nose wet, but she holds her chin high when she demands, "Show me again."

Kali swallows with difficulty, but still she obliges.

...

Kali isn't sure when she finally falls asleep, but when she opens her eyes again the sun is high in the sky and the flat is empty and silent. A drop of blood has dried under her nose, and she rubs it before she shrugs on her sweater. Goodie-two-shoes is nowhere to be found when she leaves the bedroom, which makes sense as the kitchen clocks reads way past eleven. She slept in. That's a first.

There is a plate on the coffee table, with a dry waffle and slightly burnt bacon, a fried egg that has seen better days. Still. He got her some breakfast. Kali refuses to feel anything about it, or about the note next to it that reads 'I'll be back at 3pm. Don't burn down the place.'

There is lukewarm coffee in the pot and, when she digs deep enough, Kali finds a bottle of whiskey to spike it, which helps with chewing the eggs and swallowing whatever feelings are stuck in her throat. She didn't expect this trip to be a never-ending game of "when was the last time it happened to you?" but here it is. Wondering when was the last time anyone ever cooked breakfast to her, and coming up empty.

She finishes her book by the time her stomach starts protesting again, and finds some leftovers in the fridge that she shamelessly steals from him. He will be back in an hour, but she is already bored out of her mind, and so Kali snoops around without a care in the world.

She starts with the pictures on the fridge, smiles at Jane's adorable grinning face in them. The same boy is by her side in each one of them, one arm thrown around her shoulders or his hand holding hers;

Mike, Kali deduces. The puppy love boy, apparently turned boyfriend. The normalcy of it takes her by surprise once more. The other kids she recognises from last night. One picture is of goodie-two-shoes with a smiling couple, a pretty brunette and a long-haired boy, both wearing graduation gowns. The ex-girlfriend, without a doubt.

Kali keeps collecting and storing pieces of information as she goes -- the almost empty fridge, the barely there furniture, the high school diploma she finds hidden behind old bills and useless papers. The hairspray in the bathroom, along with some cologne. The ratty basketball shirts in his drawers. The impressive collection of vinyls he keeps in the living room.

Nothing to her taste, mind you, but she's still going through it by the time the front door opens. Kali purposefully doesn't raise her head when he enters the room, but he doesn't comment or anything and, when she finally looks up, it's to find him leaning against the doorframe, legs crossed at the ankles, arms folded on his chest, smile on his lips. Amused.

"Curiosity killed the cat," he tells her.

She shrugs, shameless. "I was bored."

He shrugs too, as if accepting it as a perfectly valid excuse as to why she's been snooping around in his stuff when he wasn't there. Then he goes and grabs two beers, handing one to her before he opens the other and sits in the couch with a sigh. He's ridiculous in his police uniform, the blue making him look like a moron. She doesn't comment on it, though.

"Hopper told me to tell you..." he starts, then wrinkles his nose a little bit, as if not entirely pleased to be used that way by his boss, "than you are welcomed for diner tonight. Which means I'll have to drive you around so. Thanks."

"I have the van," she replies. She doesn't need a guy to be her driver, like she's some kind of rich lady who can't be bothered to do menial tasks on her own, thank you very much.



He raises an eyebrow, unimpressed. "So you can find the cabin again on your own?"

She opens her mouth. Thinks. Closes it. Opens it again. "Okay, fine," she pouts.

His smile looks a little too victorious for its own good, so she makes him picture spiders crawling up his arms. He startles, and glares at her, and she smirks.

"Not funny."

"I beg to differ."